Socialist Worker

ESB's 'Cost & Competitiveness Review':

VOTE 'NO' TO THE DEAL

THE FINAL outcome of the ESB's Cost & Competitiveness Review will be balloted on by all workers over the next couple of months. The company have dragged out negotiations on the new plan as a way of conditioning the workforce into accepting that major cut-backs are necessary.

The Government and ESB bosses have argued that the company is not competitive. They tell us that there has to be drastic changes in the size of the workforce and the type of work practices.

But what they really mean is that they want to clear the way to make more money for rich individual capitalists.

We pay the lowest electricity prices in Europe. But now this 'drive to efficiency' means that there will be a significant price hike to working class people and cheaper rates to business and industry.

There are already 300,000 on the dole in this country. But despite talks of the 'rigours of the market', 2,000 more jobs will go in the ESB with 210 million set aside for a redundancy package.

But the real agenda that the Government and ESB bosses try to hide has two main objectives

■ They want to create a lucrative market for private capitalism to thrive by creaming off the profits of our natural resources. The experience in Britain has shown that the introduction of privatisation led to huge price increases and big salaries for the new bosses. Powergen's profits were so enormous that they recently employed a special consultant to make recommendations about what to do with them.

■ They want to break the power of the ESB workers. It was after the strike in 1991 that the Board set itself the task of "the reduction in the effectiveness of trade union power". The action of the workers terrified them and their strategy now is to break up the company and force workers to compete with each other.

This is why workers right across the ESB should vote "NO" to the deal.

Some sections are very happy with the outcome of the negotiations. The redundancy package is obviously very attractive to older workers with long service. And while change may be needed in the company, there is no excuse for turning it on it's head.

If the ESB succeed in dividing the workforce now they will have no problem attacking wages and conditions in the future. The lifetime of this deal is only three years. If they get rid of whole categories of workers during this period they will be well positioned to go after those that will be left in the company in the future.

Whether the ballots are taken on an aggregate basis or not, workers in the ESB should reject the McKinsey based plan in all sections of the company.

Workers in the ESB are still very powerful. It is possible to fight off the Government and the bosses' plans. Some shop stewards and union leaders are already recommending rejection of the deal.

We should remember that the only reason we have this plan in front of us today is because they try to tell us that there is no alternative to the market and competition is inevitable. But workers can fight to change this. 1995 in France ended with massive strikes by public sector workers who refused to accept the logic of the market that they should tighten their belts with cuts in pension rights and social welfare. And they won.

Join the Socialist Workers Party

The betrayals of the Labour Party and Democratic Left in Government on jobs, health care, water charges and much more, has left many workers feeling disillusioned and angry. The Socialist Workers Party is fighting to build an alternative to the sell- outs of these parties in Government, based on the struggles of workers in their jobs and communities.

If you are interested in joining the SWP or finding out more fill out the slip below and return to SWP, PO Box 1648, Dublin 8, Tel (01) 872 2682

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